

Adaptation of Communication in Cyberbullying and Defamation Policy on Social Media, Review of Law No. 1 of 2024

Original Article

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media in Indonesia has increased cyberbullying and online defamation, posing risks to mental health and digital safety. In response, the government enacted Law No. 1 of 2024; however, its effectiveness depends on public understanding and communication strategies. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of policy communication and public responses to the law. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining interviews with experts and a survey of 428 digitally active citizens in Jakarta. The results show a gap between public awareness (87.8%) and understanding (25%). While 61.2% of respondents are optimistic about improving digital safety, 43.2% express concerns about potential restrictions on freedom of expression. The study concludes that current communication remains top-down and insufficient. Meaningful implementation requires a shift from punitive approaches toward empathy-based strategies prioritizing victim protection, digital citizenship education, and platform accountability. Without these structural changes, the law's objectives risk remaining aspirational rather than genuinely implementational.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Digital Communication, Digital Literacy, Law No. 1 of 2024, Policy Effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, social media has emerged as the central arena for public interaction in Indonesia. The advancement of digital technology has yielded substantial benefits by expanding access to information, fostering community building, and promoting social participation. Yet, alongside the convenience and immediacy of communication, serious challenges have surfaced, namely, the increasing prevalence of cyberbullying and online defamation. Many individuals, often unknowingly, post negative comments or derogatory labels on social media, causing harm or tarnishing reputations (Azmi, 2025).

This phenomenon not only affects personal reputations but also impacts mental health, digital security, and the integrity of public discourse. The inherently impulsive, anonymous, and viral nature of social media communication magnifies the potential spread of hate speech, slander, and harassment. A significant number of victims report diminished self-confidence. Most of these victims are children and adolescents. According to psychologist Anna Surti Ariani from the Indonesian Clinical Psychologists Association (IPK Indonesia), "45 percent of 2,777 youths aged 14-24 years have experienced cyberbullying," based on a 2021 UNICEF U-Report survey.

Alarmingly, many victims are reluctant to report their experiences to authorities or even their families. In numerous cases, they internalize the issue and only disclose it to their parents



once the cyberbullying has become severe. As a result, the situation is often already critical by the time it is shared, with victims experiencing significant psychological distress and diminished self-esteem.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defines cyberbullying as bullying or harassment conducted through digital technologies. It can occur on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms, or mobile phones. These actions are typically repeated and intended to intimidate, anger, or humiliate the targeted individuals. Examples include spreading lies, posting embarrassing photos or videos on social media, and sending hurtful, abusive, or threatening messages via messaging services.

Cyberbullying is a profoundly harmful behavior that can inflict severe emotional and psychological damage on victims. It is essential to take protective measures and report such acts to authorities or social media platform providers. This responsibility lies not only with the victims but also with anyone who witnesses such conduct. Cyberbullying often stems from a complex interplay of factors, including a false sense of security afforded by digital anonymity and a disregard for real-life consequences. Some perpetrators seek gratification or a sense of power by demeaning others, while others are influenced by peer pressure, emotional issues, or personal dissatisfaction expressed online. Additionally, a lack of awareness regarding the severe impact on victims often leads perpetrators to overlook the profound psychological harm their actions may cause.

In this context, adaptive and communicative regulation becomes an undeniable necessity. Adaptive communication refers to the ability of policy communication to adjust its content, medium, and delivery strategies according to the socio-cultural characteristics and digital literacy levels of its target audience (Mergel, 2021; Nabatchi et al., 2017). Meanwhile, communicative implementation emphasizes that the effectiveness of a policy depends not only on its legal substance but also on how it is interpreted, negotiated, and internalized through continuous interaction between the state and society (Habermas, 2020; Keller, 2021). In addition, a participatory communication framework involves engaging citizens as active stakeholders in the dissemination and co-construction of meaning, rather than passive recipients of information (Arnstein, 2021; Choi et al., 2017).

Such approaches are essential for addressing cyberbullying, as they enable regulations to be more responsive, inclusive, and context-sensitive. As part of a broader reform of digital legal policy, the Indonesian government has enacted Law No. 1 of 2024, which adopts a firmer stance on violations of communication ethics on social media while attempting to balance the protection of individual rights with freedom of expression.

A communicative approach to the implementation of Law No. 1 of 2024 is crucial, as it concerns how the law is understood, accepted, and practiced by the broader public especially within the dynamic landscape of social media. The law is specifically designed to address the growing issues of cyberbullying and defamation, which frequently occur on a massive and viral scale. However, even well-crafted legislation will be ineffective without accompanying communication strategies that are participatory, educational, and capable of reaching diverse audiences.

A communicative review of this law highlights the need for adaptive strategies by the government and stakeholders, including leveraging digital platforms as tools for legal dissemination. On the other hand, policy communication that is purely instructional disregarding the digital literacy and cultural characteristics of the public may generate resistance, misinformation, and non-compliance. Legal communication must therefore employ inclusive narratives, accessible language, and engage social actors such as influencers, educators, and digital communities.

This approach aligns with the law's spirit of public participation and citizen rights protection. Beyond enforcing legal norms, Law No. 1 of 2024 underscores the necessity of collective awareness regarding communication ethics and digital empathy. Thus, communicative implementation is not merely complementary but a strategic element essential to ensuring that the policy is not only upheld on paper but also internalized within public behavior.

Nevertheless, the success of this law heavily relies on how it is communicated to the public. Communication efforts by both the government and civil society must go beyond normative messaging, striving instead to cultivate shared understanding, engagement, and awareness (Hale et al., 2025). This contextual backdrop forms the basis of inquiry for this paper.

Social media has become the primary arena for public interaction in Indonesia, yet it has also facilitated the rise of cyberbullying and defamation. Statistics indicate that 45% of youths aged 14-24 have experienced cyberbullying, often resulting in severe psychological distress. In response, the Indonesian government enacted Law No. 1 of 2024 to provide a firmer legal stance on digital communication ethics.

However, the effectiveness of any law depends heavily on how it is socialized to the public. Current communication efforts often face resistance due to limited digital literacy and a lack of cultural nuance in message delivery. Prior studies on Indonesia's digital legal framework have largely emphasized normative and legal dimensions rather than communicative processes. For example, Andika et al. (2025) highlights the tension between protection and freedom of expression but does not explore how such policies are communicated to diverse audiences. Similarly, Ashcraft et al. (2020) examine public communication strategies but remain focused on dissemination models without analyzing audience interpretation or engagement. Furthermore, Fadiah et al. (2023) emphasize the psychological impacts of cyberbullying, yet their work does not connect these findings to policy communication mechanisms.

Recent studies also tend to prioritize digital literacy or behavioral aspects in isolation. Research by Rusdy and Fauzi (2020) and Alismaiel (2023) shows that digital literacy significantly influences cyberbullying behavior, while Yuniawati et al. (2024) stress the importance of digital citizenship in prevention efforts. In addition, Wulandari and Suranto (2023) highlight institutional efforts in schools, but without linking them to broader policy communication frameworks. A systematic review by Lin and Shih (2024) further confirms that most research focuses on technological or preventive interventions rather than communicative policy adaptation.

These studies reveal a critical gap: the absence of integrative analysis connecting legal policy, communication strategies, and public understanding—particularly among youth as primary digital users. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Law No. 1 of 2024 from a communicative perspective and to propose an adaptive, participatory communication framework that bridges the gap between awareness and substantive understanding.



Figure 1. Roadmap to Addressing Cyberbullying in Indonesia

The following research questions frame this investigation:

1. What forms of adaptive communication have emerged in addressing cyberbullying and defamation on social media following the enactment of Law No. 1 of 2024?
2. To what extent has Law No. 1 of 2024 proven effective in addressing issues of cyberbullying and defamation on social media?
3. What challenges and obstacles exist in implementing Law No. 1 of 2024 concerning the handling of cyberbullying and defamation?
4. How have the public and stakeholders responded to this new policy within the context of digital communication?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concepts and Dynamics of Cyberbullying on Social Media

Cyberbullying is defined by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as harassment conducted through digital technologies, including social media and messaging platforms. Recent scholarship conceptualizes cyberbullying as repetitive, intentional harm mediated by digital environments characterized by anonymity, persistence, and scalability (Kowalski et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2021). Studies show that anonymity in online environments fosters a "disinhibition effect," where individuals feel less accountable for their actions, increasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior (Joinson, 2007; Karaaslan & Şenses, 2023).

In the Indonesian and broader Southeast Asian context, the viral and participatory nature of social media amplifies harmful content and accelerates its spread (Lim, 2017). Empirical findings further indicate that peer dynamics, platform affordances, and algorithmic amplification contribute to the normalization of hostile communication online (Vogels, 2021). However, while existing literature explains behavioral drivers, it often lacks integration with communication policy frameworks, particularly in developing countries.

2.2. Legal Framework: Law No. 1 of 2024

Law No. 1 of 2024 represents a reform of Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law, aiming to strengthen protections against cyberbullying and defamation. Comparative legal studies emphasize that digital regulations must balance harm prevention with the protection of freedom of expression (Rehman, 2024; Suzor, 2019). In Indonesia, socio-legal analyses highlight persistent ambiguity in legal interpretation (Nafi,

2025), particularly regarding defamation and “rubber clauses,” which may create uncertainty and potential misuse.

Recent research underscores that the effectiveness of digital law is not solely determined by its normative strength but also by clarity, enforceability, and public understanding (Afzal, 2024; Citron, 2009). However, most legal scholarship remains doctrinal, focusing on statutory analysis rather than examining how such laws are communicated, interpreted, and internalized by digital users. This indicates a gap between legal design and communicative implementation.

2.3. Psychosocial Impacts and Victim Protection

Cyberbullying has been consistently linked to severe psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem (Kowalski et al., 2021; Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). UNICEF data indicating that 45% of Indonesian youth have experienced cyberbullying aligns with global trends showing increasing vulnerability among adolescents in digital spaces.

Recent longitudinal and meta-analytic studies emphasize that cyberbullying produces long-term psychological harm comparable to, or exceeding, offline bullying due to its persistent and public nature (John et al., 2018; Marciano et al., 2020). Despite the availability of legal remedies, scholars argue that criminal law functions as a reactive or “downstream” intervention, often failing to address immediate psychological needs (Livingstone, 2018).

Consequently, contemporary research advocates for integrating mental health support and preventive education into policy responses (Lawrance et al., 2026). However, limited attention has been given to how communication strategies can bridge legal protection with psychosocial recovery, particularly in policy dissemination contexts.

2.4. Policy Communication and Digital Citizenship

The effectiveness of digital regulation depends not only on legal substance but also on communication strategies that shape public understanding and compliance. Studies show that one-way, top-down communication often leads to resistance, misinformation, and low policy engagement (Mergel, 2020; Nabatchi et al., 2017). Participatory and dialogic communication approaches are therefore recommended to enhance policy legitimacy and public trust.

The concept of “Digital Citizenship” has emerged as a key framework in addressing online behavior, emphasizing ethical participation, critical thinking, and digital responsibility (Choi et al., 2017; Marinho & Carneiro, 2018). Empirical studies demonstrate that digital citizenship education significantly reduces cyberbullying tendencies and promotes prosocial online behavior (Jones & Mitchell, 2016).

In addition, platform governance plays a crucial role, as algorithmic systems designed for engagement may unintentionally amplify harmful content (Gillespie, 2020). This highlights the need for collaborative governance involving governments, educators, and technology companies. Nevertheless, existing studies tend to examine these elements separately, lacking an integrative framework that connects legal policy, communication strategies, and audience reception.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative strategies within a single research framework. The qualitative strand involves thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with three subject-matter experts representing the fields of communication, law, and psychology. The quantitative strand utilizes a structured

online questionnaire to gather measurable data on public understanding of and attitudes toward Law No. 1 of 2024. Together, these two approaches allow for a more complete and integrative depiction of the social realities and communication dynamics surrounding the law's implementation.

3.2. Data Sources

Data sources include both primary and secondary materials. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with three subject-matter experts, a communication practitioner, a legal academic, and a clinical psychologist, as well as an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to digitally active respondents. Secondary data consist of academic journals, online news sources, government policy documents, and documentation of communication campaigns conducted since the law's enactment.

3.3. Data Collection

Qualitative. In-depth interviews were conducted with three experts, each representing a distinct professional field relevant to the study. Interview guidelines were structured to explore each expert's perspective on communication adaptation, legal interpretation, and the psychological impact of cyberbullying under Law No. 1 of 2024. Alongside the interviews, the researcher observed policy dissemination content across major social media platforms – Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), examining how communication narratives are constructed by the government and how the public responds through comments, discussions, and campaign participation.

Quantitative. Quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument contained both closed- and open-ended questions addressing respondents' understanding of the law's content, attitudes toward cyberbullying, and perceptions of digital communication ethics. The survey targeted digitally active individuals, with a geographic focus on the Jakarta Capital Region as the primary epicenter of policy-making and digital communication.

3.4. Data Validation

Prior to analysis, the raw dataset of 437 initial responses underwent a systematic cleaning process. Eight duplicate entries and one invalid response (flagged due to inconsistent and illogical answer patterns) were removed, yielding a final validated sample of 428 respondents (N = 428). To maintain internal consistency, all remaining responses were reviewed for pattern bias (e.g., identical answers across all items), logical consistency between related questions, and completion integrity. Responses failing these criteria were excluded from the final dataset.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a dual approach aligned with the mixed-methods design. Interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and expert perspectives on the law's implementation. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, with findings presented through numerical tabulations to illustrate levels of public understanding and attitudes toward the policy. The quantitative results are based on aggregated Likert-scale responses, with percentages reflecting grouped categories, for example, "Agree" and "Strongly Agree", to highlight general trends in public perception. This integrative approach was designed to produce a cohesive and multidimensional analysis of the research problem.

3.6. In-Depth Interview Guidelines

The following questions served as structured guidelines for in-depth interviews conducted with experts across three fields: communication, law, and psychology. These guidelines were designed to explore interviewees' perspectives on communication adaptation, legal dimensions, and the psychological impact of cyberbullying and defamation following the enactment of Law No. 1 of 2024.

A. Interview 1: Communication Expert

Interviewee: Muhammad Naufal Muyassar, S.Pd. | Practitioner, Administrator at Daarul Muttaqien Middle School | *August 7, 2025*



Figure 2. Interview with Mr. Muhammad Naufal Muyassar, S.Pd., Practitioner (Administrator at Daarul Muttaqien Middle School)

The interview was conducted with the following questions:

1. What is the role of communication ethics in preventing and addressing cyberbullying cases on social media with reference to Law No. 1 of 2024, and do you consider it sufficient?
2. What are the main challenges in adapting public communication patterns to align with Law No. 1 of 2024 concerning defamation and cyberbullying on social media?
3. How effective is Law No. 1 of 2024 in establishing clear boundaries between insult and defamation on social media, and what is its impact on netizens' communication behavior?
4. What role do social media platforms play in supporting the implementation of the anti-cyberbullying policy stipulated in Law No. 1 of 2024?
5. What communication strategies are effective in raising public awareness, particularly among adolescents, about communication ethics and the negative impacts of cyberbullying under Law No. 1 of 2024?

B. Interview 2: Legal Academic

Interviewee: Bahori, S.H., M.H. | Academic, Lecturer and Lawyer | *August 9, 2025*



Figure 3. Interview with Mr. Bahori, S.H., M.H., Academic (Lecturer and Lawyer)

The interview was conducted with the following questions:

1. How would you assess the effectiveness of Law No. 1 of 2024 in responding to cyberbullying and defamation, particularly from the perspective of legal communication to the public?
2. Are the definitions and boundaries of "defamation" and "cyberbullying" in the law sufficiently clear and aligned with the characteristics of modern digital communication?
3. What is the biggest challenge in enforcing the articles related to cyberbullying and defamation, especially regarding evidence and the protection of rights for both victims and alleged perpetrators?
4. To what extent has the legal communication approach in Law No. 1 of 2024 accounted for the dynamics of digital culture and the use of informal language or sarcasm?
5. How do you view the role of collaboration between law enforcement, social media platforms, and the public in implementing this policy effectively and equitably?

C. Interview 3: Psychologist

Interviewee: Dr. Aski Marissa, M.Psi., Psychologist | Founder, Jiwa Insan Mental Health Community | August 10, 2025



Figure 4. Interview with Dr. Aski Marissa, M.Psi., Psychologist

The interview was conducted with the following questions:

1. From a psychological perspective, what are the most common psychological impacts experienced by cyberbullying victims on social media, particularly in the Indonesian context?
2. What is the ideal approach to supporting cyberbullying victims in their recovery, and are there specific methods that are particularly effective for youth?
3. In your practice, do you observe a gap between the legal protection offered by Law No. 1 of 2024 and the actual psychological needs of victims? How should this policy communication be adapted?
4. What role can psychology students or mental health professionals play in intervening or supporting cyberbullying victims in the initial stages?
5. How important is public education about the psychological impacts of cyberbullying, and what communication strategies are effective in raising awareness within the context of Law No. 1 of 2024?

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Public Awareness vs. Substantive Understanding

Table 1. Understanding that Law No. 1 of 2024 Regulates Cyberbullying

Option	Frequency	Percentage
5 (Strongly Aware)	224	52.3%
4 (Aware)	152	35.5%
3 (Neutral)	43	10.0%
2 (Unaware)	5	1.2%
1 (Strongly Unaware)	4	0.9%

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents (87.8%) demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding the existence of Law No. 1 of 2024.

Table 2. Perception that Law No. 1 of 2024 is Not Sufficiently Understood by the Youth

Option	Frequency	Percentage
5 (Strongly Agree)	167	39.0%
4 (Agree)	181	42.3%
3 (Neutral)	64	15.0%
2 (Disagree)	11	2.6%
1 (Strongly Disagree)	5	1.2%

Table 2 indicates that 81.3% of respondents agree that the law is not sufficiently understood by adolescents and young adults.

4.1.2. Perceived Effectiveness and Public Support

Table 3. Belief that the Law Can Prevent Cyberbullying

Option	Frequency	Percentage
5 (Strongly Agree)	98	22.9%
4 (Agree)	164	38.3%
3 (Neutral)	127	29.7%
2 (Disagree)	28	6.5%
1 (Strongly Disagree)	11	2.6%

Table 3 shows that 61.2% of respondents believe that the law has the potential to prevent cyberbullying.

Table 4. Support for Strict Law Enforcement Against Perpetrators of Defamation

Option	Frequency	Percentage
5 (Strongly Agree)	279	65.2%
4 (Agree)	114	26.6%
3 (Neutral)	29	6.8%
2 (Disagree)	4	0.9%
1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	0.5%

Table 4 demonstrates strong public support (91.8%) for strict law enforcement against perpetrators of defamation.

4.1.3. Concerns Regarding Freedom of Expression

Table 5. Perception that the Policy is Too Strict and Restricts Freedom of Expression

Option	Frequency	Percentage
5 (Strongly Agree)	68	15.9%
4 (Agree)	117	27.3%
3 (Neutral)	129	30.1%
2 (Disagree)	68	15.9%
1 (Strongly Disagree)	46	10.7%

Table 5 indicates that 43.2% of respondents express concern that the law may restrict freedom of expression.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Prior Studies

The identified gap between high awareness (87.8%) and low substantive understanding (25%) supports previous research emphasizing that exposure to policy information does not necessarily translate into comprehension or behavioral change. Studies on digital policy communication highlight that one-way dissemination often results in superficial awareness rather than meaningful engagement (Mergel, 2020; Nabatchi et al., 2021). This aligns with the present findings, suggesting that current communication strategies surrounding Law No. 1 of 2024 remain predominantly informational rather than interactive or educational.

Furthermore, the limited understanding among youth reinforces prior studies on digital literacy and digital citizenship, which argue that younger users require structured educational interventions to interpret and apply digital norms effectively (Choi et al., 2017; Jones & Mitchell, 2016). The findings therefore extend existing literature by empirically demonstrating how this gap manifests in the context of legal policy communication in Indonesia.

4.2.2. Convergences and Divergences with Previous Research

The mixed perception of effectiveness optimism (61.2%) alongside skepticism (30%) is consistent with socio-legal research suggesting that digital regulations often generate aspirational support but face practical challenges in enforcement (Suzor, 2020; Keller, 2021). This convergence indicates that public trust in digital law is conditional upon its perceived enforceability.

However, this study diverges from prior legal scholarship that primarily frames digital law as a normative instrument. The findings reveal that public skepticism is not only related to enforcement limitations but also to perceived disconnects between legal mechanisms and user experience in digital environments. This highlights the importance of examining policy communication as a mediating factor, which remains underexplored in earlier studies.

4.2.3. Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to the intersection of policy communication theory and digital citizenship frameworks. First, they reinforce the argument that effective policy implementation requires a shift from top-down communication toward participatory and dialogic models. Second, they support digital citizenship theory, which emphasizes that ethical digital behavior is shaped not only by regulation but also by education, literacy, and social norms (Marinho & Carneiro, 2018).

Additionally, the observed tension between protection (91.8%) and freedom of expression concerns (43.2%) reflects the broader theoretical dilemma in digital governance:

balancing regulatory control with democratic participation. This study suggests that communication strategy plays a critical role in mediating this tension by shaping how legal boundaries are perceived and accepted by the public.

4.2.4. Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the sample is geographically concentrated in the Jakarta Capital Region, which may not fully represent perspectives from rural or less digitally connected populations. Second, the use of self-reported survey data may introduce response bias, particularly in measuring perceived understanding and attitudes. Third, the rapidly evolving nature of digital communication limits the ability to capture long-term changes in behavior following the enactment of the law. Future research should expand the geographic scope, incorporate longitudinal designs, and further explore the role of platform-specific communication strategies in shaping public understanding of digital policies.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that while the dissemination of Law No. 1 of 2024 has achieved a high level of public awareness at 87.8%, it has failed to foster deep substantive understanding, with only 25% of respondents reporting strong comprehension. This gap reflects communication strategies that remain predominantly superficial, suggesting that without a transition toward structured digital literacy education, the law's objectives risk remaining aspirational rather than implementational. Although 61.2% of respondents are cautiously optimistic about the law's potential to create a safer digital environment, significant skepticism persists regarding enforcement effectiveness and the risk of the law being misused to suppress free expression; a tension that demands clearer legal boundaries within modern digital culture. Ultimately, this study argues that meaningful implementation requires a shift from downstream punitive measures toward upstream, empathy-based strategies centered on victim protection, digital citizenship education, and platform accountability.

To support a more inclusive and effective implementation of Law No. 1 of 2024, this study proposes three interconnected recommendations. First, the government should formally integrate a progressive digital citizenship curriculum, encompassing ethics, empathy, and mental health in digital spaces, across all levels of education from elementary to higher education, as a long-term upstream strategy for cyberbullying prevention. Second, public communication surrounding the law must shift its narrative from one centered on the threat of punishment to one that foregrounds victim protection and support; all communication materials should explicitly include accessible information on mental health support services to ensure the law is perceived as protective rather than purely punitive. Third, more specific derivative regulations should be developed to govern the accountability of digital platforms in content moderation and the design of ethical algorithmic systems, recognizing that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without structural accountability from the platforms through which cyberbullying primarily occurs.

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